

Laboratory Information Relating to Chili Sauce Recall and Botulism

To: All clinical laboratories

From: MI Department of Community Health, Bureau of Laboratories (MDCH BOL)

July 20, 2007

The recall this week of chili sauce and related products containing botulinum toxin and distributed in 23 states, including Michigan, has led to an increase in calls to MDCH concerning possible cases. In anticipation of further calls, a review of laboratory testing requirements follows.

The decision to implement antitoxin treatment is an urgent clinical decision, and should not be dependent on laboratory testing. Release of antitoxin for treatment from CDC requires consultation with MDCH Bureau of Epidemiology (BOE). In suspect cases, the attending/ordering physician should contact the BOE at 517-335-8165 (days) or 517-335-9030 (outside of normal business hours) to confirm the patient meets the clinical criteria, which include:

- Evidence of cranial nerve palsy (drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, double or blurred vision, dry mouth)
- Muscle weakness that moves progressively down the body, affecting the shoulders first, then descending to the upper arms, lower arms, thighs, calves, etc. Shortness of breath and difficulty maintaining adequate breathing may ensue.
- Constipation may or may not be present.

Testing for possible botulism should be directed only to public health laboratories.

Specimens to be collected to confirm a clinical diagnosis of botulism include:

- 10-15 ml serum, refrigerated, not frozen.
- 15-25 grams of stool (walnut-sized portion), refrigerated, not in transport.
- Implicated foods should be maintained in the original container, refrigerated unless already frozen; if frozen, don't thaw.

Once testing has been approved, contact the BOL to arrange transport of specimens at 517-335-8067 during normal business hours or 517-335-9030 after hours. Samples should be shipped on cold packs.